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**N.B.—All Communications should reach the Editor, Ardeevin, Cadogan Park, Belfast, not later than the 16th of the month preceding publication.**

## "Criticism and Life."

By criticism we are to understand the judging or examining of a thing with a view to the knowledge of its true character. Frequently, many people think of criticism as censure, the outcome of a judgment which is unfavourable. We would avoid this popular use of the term, and think of the attempt to understand things as they are by careful scrutiny of their nature and tendency.

That this is essential at all times a little reflection will show. Several centuries before the Christian era Plato declared that "the unexamined life is unlivable for a human being, for a real man." Thus, it is the mark of manhood to cross-examine all that enters into human experience—outward nature, with its play and interplay of forces, the mystery of the intimate human relationships, the complex texture of social motives and movements, the solemn feelings of wonder and awe impelling to worship. He who remains unresponsive to these things, unconstrained to put the persistent questions: "Why?" and "Wherefore?" lacks the necessary attributes of complete humanity.

Criticism in this wide sense fashioned the contents of civilisation. It provided the early Greek thinker with his theory of the universe, it coloured the morality of a Marcus Aurelius, it furnished the poet or painter with his theme, roused to rapture the mind of the mystic, rewarded the scientist with the key to unlock the secrets of nature. The contributions of all the masters of human life and its lore came in response to the unwearying endeavour to know and understand all that entered into life.

Is it not therefore fitting that the greatest teachers who sought to make the most of life were searching questioners in this high, compelling sense? Jesus, confronted by hostile critics in the narrow sense, made answer: "And why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" In the same spirit Paul faced the critical Christians at Corinth with the pertinent injunction: "Try your own selves, whether ye be in the Faith; prove your own selves." Criticism, to be complete, must comprize self-criticism.

At the present time criticism is general, and nothing evades its searchlight. Industrial and social conditions, national and international relations, Christian and Non-Christian religions—all these have their critics, both in the larger and the narrower sense. We would not have it otherwise. There is ample room for amendment in every phase of human activity and enterprise. But where shall we begin if not with the old question: "What is your life?" It still remains true that "the soul of reformation is the reformation of the soul." Without self-criticism, searching and insistent, we cannot hope for the best impulse to social and national betterment.

## Notes of the Month.

We find it necessary this month to make further increase in the printed copies of the Magazine. This is due to enlarged demands on the part of our congregations. We understand that in some cases last month there was a shortage in the parcels sent to some few centres. For that we would express our regret and also our determination to see that in future all requests shall be fully met. A slight increase in the number circulated in each congregation will widen the usefulness of the Magazine, particularly if copies be given to persons outside our own congregations. To let others know what we are thinking and doing is the best way of creating a bond of sympathetic interest.

* *

The month of May is the time-honoured month for meetings in connection with the various religious bodies. This year they will be made almost impossible if the general strike be not avoided, as we most fervently hope it may. Thus the British and Foreign Unitarian Association will meet in Whit-week, May 17-19. In the notices sent out the name of Dr. Mellone will appear as Secretary in place of that of Mr. Bowie, whose retirement has now taken effect. We hope that the meetings will prove a great success, and that the presence of an American Divine as preacher of the Annual Sermon may solve to signify and strengthen the links that unite British Unitarianism with that of America.

* *

The article on Lay-eldership which appears in this issue is deserving of careful attention, especially in connection with our coming Annual Meetings on June 14 and 15. It frequently happens that even at the General Synod some of our congregations are not represented by a Lay Elder. That is bad, both numerically and ecclesiastically. It should be possible for each congregation to secure Lay representation once a year, great as the difficulties may be on other occasions. Important questions frequently arise, affecting the welfare of our church, and requiring a pronouncement which should be something more than a ministerial expression of opinion. Certainly, if we really wish to make our Annual Meetings more interesting and influential we must make sure of a minimum of a minister and a Lay Elder from each congregation.

* *

On May 5th, 1821, Napoleon I passed away from the world in which he had played so stirring a part. Would we might believe that now a century has elapsed, the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them had eliminated the militaristic spirit which created his opportunity of world-wide disturbance. Frankly, we are disappointed in the outlook. The new President of the United States has definitely refused to give the League of Nations any assistance so far as his country is officially concerned. We cannot but feel that his views do not reflect the whole or the best mind of America. Ex-President Wilson may have made mistakes in method and thereby alienated some of his countrymen, but we believe that his principles were right and are considered so by many thoughtful Americans. Be that as it may, it seems to us that the League of Nations still holds the field, and with or without American support can play an important part in prohibiting future war and disarming the power of Militarism at home and abroad.

* *

We would remind our readers in good time that the Sunday School Conference is to be held on the first Saturday in June at Comber. The details of the programme are announced elsewhere. In the meantime, all interested in Sunday School work should make a note of the date and determine, if possible, to be present at the event. From past experience we know that our Comber friends will see that the hospitality extended to their visitors lacks neither heartiness nor adequacy.

## An Irish Author and his Works

On May 10th, 1838, there was born in Belfast a boy destined to attain a high position and to become widely known as author and man of affairs. As Viscount Bryce he is now possessed of international fame and esteem, and this will be further enhanced by his recently published work, "Modern Democracies." University training in Glasgow and Oxford, a keen interest in historical study, the close scrutiny of men and affairs, combined to make his first book a conspicuous success. Its title, "The Holy Roman Empire," was applied to the essay which won its author the Arnold Prize at Oxford in 1863. The Prize Essay in an enlarged form has since passed through various editions and obtained position as a standard work. A Professorship of Civil Law at Oxford and Parliamentary responsibilities later widened his knowledge while deepening his historical interests. "The American Commonwealth" was published in 1888, and has appeared in later editions since, and this great work is nowhere more highly valued than in America itself. As a recognized authority and as a man of fine character, he made an ideal representative of Great Britain in the United States. Lately, Viscount Bryce's ripe experience and wide culture found embodiment in the two large volumes which make up "Modern Democracies." It is no exhaustive review that we attempt to give of this remarkable production, but merely an impression gained of its broad judicial character and its scrupulous impartiality. It is conceived in the true scientific spirit. The facts gathered from wide experience and reading are given and then left to speak for themselves. It is in no sense an *ex parte* statement for or against this or that form of Democracy. Dealing with the latter in its generally accepted sense—"the rule of the whole people expressing their sovereign will by their votes"—theauthor gives a comparative study of several popular governments in their actual working. Great Britain is deliberately excluded from treatment for a reason that does credit to his truly scientific and impartial purpose, viz., to give no opportunity to an author who is himself British in birth and sympathy to depart from strict impartiality and detachment. The democracies considered in their actual working are France, Switzerland, Canada, the United States of America, Spanish South America, Australia and New Zealand. In all these cases he brings to bear general principles clearly laid down and defined in the first part of the book. Therein democracy is characterised, its historical evolution clearly sketched, its theoretical foundations indicated. The relations of democracy with education, religion, the press, etc., are unfolded. In this way, advancing from the general to the particular, the reason is provided with a standard of estimate to appraise the specific forms assumed in democracy in the countries under review. The book is exceedingly well-planned and balanced, the style lucid and attractive. Naturally, many controversial matters might very easily obtrude if our author were less conspicuously conscientious and skilful, but so far as we have read his work—and we make no pretence of exhaustive perusal—he is true in principle and in fact to his own frankly expressed view, a view-point which might be copied with marked advantage by other social inquirers: "What I desire is, not to impress upon my readers views of my own, but to supply them with facts, and (so far as I can) with explanations of facts on which they can reflect and from which they can draw their own conclusions." We sincerely hope that many will be induced to submit to the author's informing and thought-provoking purpose. They will inevitably gain a clearer outlook upon many developments and problems of a very democratic age.

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No service in itself is small,
None great though earth it fill,
But that is small that seeks its own,
And great that seek God's will.

## Is there a Gospel in Nature?

A great Naturalist was recently asked by a clergyman to give an address to his congregation on the Gospel of Nature. The request set him thinking whether or not Nature had any Gospel in the sense the clergyman had in mind. Our young people who have read Seton's Nature-books will remember that he claims to find what we may call the biological value of the Ten Commandments in the lives of the wild animals. The Ten Commandments are not arbitrary laws, they are founded upon the needs of the social organism; but whether they have the same foundation in the needs of animal life apart from man, apart from the world of moral obligation, is another question. It is true that the command against murder is pretty well kept by the higher animals. They rarely kill their own kind; hawks do not prey upon hawks, nor foxes prey upon foxes; but lower down this does not hold. Trout eat trout, and young spiders eat one another. There is but little, if any, neighbourly love among even the higher animals. They treat one another as rivals, or associate for mutual protection. One cow will lick another in the most affectionate manner, and the next moment savagely gore her. A few of the higher animals are monogamous, but by far the greater number of species are polygamous or promiscuous. Among the birds, we find mating, and occasional pairing for life, as with the ostrich and perhaps the eagle. As for the rights of property among them, we know that bees will rob bees and that ants will rob ants, but that the squirrel or the field-mouse is inclined to plunder the stores of another of its own species is uncertain. Wild birds do not steal the nesting-material of another bird of the same kind, but they have been known to carry off the material belonging to other species. As to most of the other commandments—of coveting, of bearing false witness, of honouring father and mother, and so forth—how can these apply to the animals? Parental obedience cannot be where there are no commands, but the alarm-cries of the parents are quickly understood by the young, and their actions imitated in the presence of danger, which of course has a biological value.

Has Nature then a Gospel? Do the birds and animals teach any valuable lessons? Do the flowers, the trees, the soil, the coming and the going of the seasons? Does man find 'tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything'? Do the lilies of the field, that neither toil nor spin, help him in any way to clothe himself with humility, with justice, with truthfulness? It is not easy to say what one owes to all these things. Natural influences work indirectly as well as directly; they work upon the sub-conscious as well as upon the conscious self. That Nature helps him to be a saner, healthier, more contented man, with truer standards of life we are more than ever convinced, and Wordsworth testifies that 'the thought of death sits easy on the man who has been born and dies among the mountains.' One thing seems certain that, hygienically, Nature is supreme. The open-air perfumes, especially in spring, the breath of the woods, of the pastures, of the shore, are so much purer and healthier than the fumes of tobacco, smoky offices, or heated ball-rooms. Health and happiness adhere to the Nature worshipper. It is easier to get a spark out of a stone than a moral. Even when it contains a fossil, it teaches history rather than morals. If we are to find sermons in stones, we must look for them in the relations of the stones to other things—when they press down the grass or the flowers, or impede the plough, or dull the scythe, or shelter vermin, as do old institutions and old usages that have had their day. 'A rolling stone gathers no moss,' which is not bad for the stone, as moss hastens decay: knocked about it gets its sharp angles worn off, as do men. 'People who live in glass houses should not throw stones,' reminds us that we are no better than our neighbours. The lesson in running brooks is that motion is a great purifier and health producer. When the brook ceases to

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run, it soon stagnates; and there is good in everything, because law is in everything, truth is in everything, the sequence of cause and effect is in everything, and the Universe will be good to us if on right principles we relate our life to it. Our well-being consists in learning its laws and in adjusting our lives to it.

We now use the word Nature very much as our fathers used the word God, and at the back of it we mean the power that is everywhere present and active, and in whose lap the visible universe is held and nourished. It is a Power that we can see and touch and hear, and we realize every moment of our lives how absolutely we are dependent upon it. There are no atheists or sceptics in regard to this Power. All men see how literally we are its children, and all men soon learn how swift and sure is the penalty of disobedience to its commands.

But Nature-love as Emerson knew it, and the choicer spirits of our time have known it, has distinctly a religious value. It does not come to a man or a woman who is wholly absorbed in selfish or worldly or material ends. Except we become in a measure as little children, we cannot enter the Kingdom of Nature, as Jefferies entered it, as Thoreau entered it, as Amiel and Burroughs entered it. The forms and creeds of religion change, but the sentiment of religion—the wonder and reverence and love we feel in the Presence of the inscrutable Universe—persists. This Gospel of Nature revealing itself in a growing wonder, reverence, and love for all natural objects, with an increasing tenderness towards all forms of life, so as 'never to blend our pleasure or our pride with sorrow of the meanest thing that feels,' is the essence of the Gospel of Jesus. It is Glad-tidings—a Gospel of contentment, of appreciation, of gratitude, of heeding simple near-by duties—a gospel —the burden of which is love, but love that goes hand in hand with law, for 'the permanent interest of every man is to have the weight of Nature to back him in all that he does.' G. V. C.

## Obituary.

### LARNE AND KILWAUGHTER.

Our congregation has suffered severely during the past few weeks from deaths, some of them very sudden. Mention was made in the April number of this Magazine of the awfully sudden passing of Mr. James Nelson on March 5th. On the 13th of same month he was followed by Mrs. Nelson, widow of Mr. Hugh Nelson, whose decease was caused accidentally some time ago in the Aluminium Works. On 31st March the end came with startling suddenness to Mr. William Bailie, eldest son of the late Hugh Bailie, of Kilwaughter Lime Works. Sitting in his garden the seizure came on, and although he continued conscious for a time it never relaxed. A Sunday Scholar in boyhood, Mr. Bailie was educated in Ayr, in Scotland. On his return with his brother he was a most faithful and energetic member of our congregation, taught in the Kilwaughter Sunday School, and well educated as he was and refined in his tastes, he gave his services in the choir and organised and conducted many entertainments, musical and otherwise. Subsequently he purchased and removed to Martrey Manor, in Co. Tyrone, a magnificent mansion and property formerly owned and occupied by one of the M.P.s. for the county named. He was married to a charming Scotch lady, and as his children came, he showed his undiminished affection and loyalty to his ancestral congregation, by bringing them to his father's and mother's home to have them baptized by the writer. Selling his property in Tyrone and returning to Larne, as did his brother from India, it was a great joy to the minister and people to have the two sons of Hugh Bailie—deceased several years now—in the congregation and taking an active interest in the affairs there. In addition to the ordinary concerns of the congregation, the deceased acted as President this last winter of the Unity Guild. His funeral to Kilwaughter on Sunday, April 3rd, was very large. The Rev. D. H.

Hanson, of Gardenmore Presbyterian Church, officiated for Rev. J. Kennedy, who was unequal to the duty through illness. Mr. Bailie leaves a widow and two children, to whom the affectionate sympathy of the congregation and of the community generally goes forth.

On the day following the day of Mr. Bailie's death, the oldest lady of the congregation, Mrs. Martin, passed gently and peacefully away. She entered her 100th year on Candlemas Day, and was clear in mind and memory till the last, and only a few weeks ago was going about and calling with her friends in the vicinity. Her husband and son and daughter all pre-deceased her many years ago.

The customary references were made from the pulpit on Sunday, April 10th, and instead of a funeral march the choir, led by Mr. Holmes, our accomplished organist, rendered with touching pathos and feeling Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar."

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## MR. WILLIAM DEMPSTER.

The York Street congregation has lost one of its most staunch and devoted members by the death of Mr. William Dempster, who passed away at his residence in York Street on April 1st. Mr. Dempster was an old member of the congregation, who, on its revival under the present ministry, threw himself most heartily into every effort put forth for reorganization. His business ability, and clear devotedness to the welfare of the church, at once won the hearts of everyone, and his loss is felt very keenly. For several years he had been in frail and uncertain health, but no one expected such a sudden end. He attended both services at church a few days before he passed away, and that was typical of the deceased, who would never allow anything but serious sickness prevent him from church attendance.

The funeral took place on Monday, April 4th, to New Church, Islandmagee, the services being conducted by the Rev. F. Woolley, assisted by Rev. Alex. O. Ashworth.

Mr. Dempster leaves a widow and four young children, to whom we offer our deepest sympathy.

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## MISS LAWTHER,

### Ballyministra, Killinchy.

Miss Mary Jane Lawther had reached the advanced age of 81 years and until quite recently was a regular attendant at church. She taught diligently and successfully in the Sunday School for many years. She was the last of her name remaining in the neighbourhood. Her family was connected with the Remonstrant Church from the beginning. She was of the modest, humble kind, yet cheery and industrious, ever ready to lend a helping hand to all her connection. She was a worker to the last as far as her strength allowed. Though bent almost double with age and infirmity, she walked a considerable distance to church until her step became so slow and feeble as to incapacitate her. Hers was a cheery, bright disposition, though never blessed with too much of the world's goods. She ever maintained a constancy and courage worthy of all admiration. Her remains were interred in the New Meeting House Green, Killinchy, the Rev. D. J. Williams officiating.

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Mr. John Miller, of Killenican, died on March 24th, having been ill for six or seven weeks. He had been in failing health during the past year or more. In his youth and prime he was engaged in business in Belfast, and was well known to the older generation of business people of that city. For many years past he lived a retired life at the home of his brother, Mr. Robert Miller, Killenican. He was a man of great intelligence and business acumen. He held a lifelong connection with our household of faith and was staunch and true. Though retiring in his habits he was of a genial temperament and an entertaining companion. The funeral took place on Saturday, 26th of March, when his remains were interred in the New Meeting House Green, Killinchy, the Rev. D. J. Williams officiating.

## Lay Eldership.

It is a deplorable fact that at the majority of our Church Courts Lay Elders are almost entirely absent. This means that the majority of congregations have inadequate representation, as each congregation ought to be represented by its Preaching Elder and its Lay Elder. It is true that Lay Elders do turn up when they have "an axe to grind," but they are generally so lamentably ignorant of Presbyterian law as to be quite unable to put forward their business in a correct way. It follows that the government of our Church has almost entirely fallen into the hands of the ministers—the Preaching Elders—a state of things entirely at variance with the true spirit of Presbyterianism.

The ministers are constant in their denunciation of the slackness of their Lay brothers in these matters. Where Elders are duly appointed—and such appointments are not always made—they will not go to the trouble and expense of going to Belfast and spending a day on the work of the Church. This work, however, must be carried on, so it falls to the lot of the ministers to get it done without assistance from the laity.

But on the other hand, our ministers are not always quite fair in their criticism of the Lay representatives. Do they always make a point of letting them know of the meetings of Presbytery? I myself know at least one congregation where Presbytery meetings are practically never announced from the pulpit, and are any steps taken otherwise to insure the presence of the Lay Elders?

It is clearly the duty of Session to appoint its own elders, and it is equally clear that it is the duty of the minister, as Moderator of Session, to see that such appointments are made, and if the Lay representative does not attend to his duty through carelessness or slackness or what you will, one would think it was the minister's duty to report to Session and have the matter rectified, either by bringing pressure to bear upon the individual, or having someone else appointed.

Thus laity and clergy each lay the blame at the other's door. But if we are to be Presbyterians, let us have real Presbyterian Government and not the sham we have at present. One hears of both clergy and laity alike who openly sneer at the Presbytery's authority in matters of discipline. This should not be, and if the Elders could be made to realise their responsibilities and be more punctilious in discharging their duties all would soon realise that our form of church government is really most helpful to all concerned.

It seems to me that good work might be done in these directions by the newly formed Laymen's League. Here we have a body of men banded together "to take a more active part in the work of the churches." The opportunity lies to hand, and is indeed an integral part of our church system. But we must not expect to do things all in a moment. Our laity must learn something of Presbyterian law first of all, and not try to override it, because they do not grasp its meaning straight away. If the League can stimulate a real interest in the Church's work sufficiently strong to achieve this, and can succeed in getting Laymen of real worth from each congregation to attend the Church Courts and give the benefit of their ripe judgment and business ability to the conduct of church affairs, the ministers would be only too glad to welcome their assistance.

EUSTACE GORDON.

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DEATHS.

ARBUCKLE—April 13th, 1921, 14 Danube Street, Belfast, Matilda, relict of the late Samuel Arbuckle, Ballyminnimore, Glenavy. Interred Crumlin, April 16th.

MARTIN—April 4th, 1921, at a Private Nursing Home, Mary Davidson Martin, "Innisfail," Ravenhill Park, Belfast. Interred Killyleigh, April 6th.

NEILL—On March 21st, Elizabeth Neill, aged 90, a long time worshipper with York Street Congregation, Belfast, widow of the late James Neill, buried March 23rd, in the Shankill Graveyard, Belfast, by her old Minister, Rev. Alexr. O. Ashworth.

## Young People's Page.

### "THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY."

Many writers for old and young have united in their praise of May and its manifold attractions. The first great English poet, Chaucer, gives expression to his feeling of happiness when May comes to encourage renewed intercourse with natural beauty. A later poet enters as fully into the charms of the month when he sings:

> Sweet May hath come to love us,
> Flowers, trees, their blossoms don;
> And through the blue heavens above us
> The very clouds move on.

Yet it is not alone the poets who take possession of May and its natural gifts. Peoples, the whole world over, have welcomed it with popular song or religious ceremony. Some of the May celebrations are very interesting. Years ago the writer took part in one in an old-world continental town. Towards midnight on the last evening of April, old and young folk crowded together in the market-place and waited expectantly for the striking of twelve o'clock. When the last stroke of the hour had struck cheers were given, and the salutations of friends and neighbours became general. Then well-known folk songs were sung to the accompaniment of a good brass band. All was mirth and rejoicing. Outside the town as well as within its narrow streets, bon-fires blazed and fireworks were set off, and the whole scene was one of great animation. Later on May-day the children assembled in their schools and sang most heartily a very familiar and much-loved song: "The May is come."

Amongst us the celebration does not take the same form, but for many days we have been led to anticipate the month of May as we looked at little groups of young people with their May Queen dancing amongst them. The sight reminded us of the time when the Maypole and its ceremonies were common features of the May festival.

The Puritans attacked the maypole as "a heathenish vanity greatly abused to superstition and wickedness." A Puritan writer who lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth gives us a picture of the celebration at which his kind took exception. These are his words, put into modern form: "But their chiefest jewel they bring from the woods in their May pole, which they bring home with great veneration as thus: They have twenty or forty yoke of oxen, every ox having a sweet nosegay of flowers tied on the tip of his horns, and these oxen draw home this Maypole (this stinking idol rather) which is covered all over with flowers and herbs, bound round about with strings, from top to bottom, and sometimes painted with variable colours, with two or three hundred men, women and children, following it with great devotion. And thus being reared up with handkerchiefs and flags streaming on the top, they straw the ground about, bind green boughs about it, set up summer halls, bowers, and arbours hard by it. And then fall they to banquet and feast, to leap and dance about it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idols, whereof this is a perfect pattern, or rather the thing itself."

This Puritan feeling against the Maypole and its ceremonies took effect in the year 1644, when the Long Parliament ordered the removal of the Maypoles. Why was this, and what reason was there for objecting to the May Festival as "a heathenish vanity"? It seems to be a well-established fact that the later celebrations have a long history behind them. They are a link with a far-distant and pre-Christian form of worship. It was once believed that gods had their abode or manifested their activity in the trees. The bringing in of the May in the form of a tree, or even of branches and garlands taken from the tree, was thought of as a means of obtaining the newly-quickened spirit appearing in the May woods. Of course, we no longer cherish the thought or practise the rites of our pagan fathers, but the modern celebration and its associations lose no interest when we consider that what we do to-day generations of old and young folk did long before, in response to the May spirit of the year.

## Lesson Notes.

[In accordance with the Scheme for 1921, prepared by the Sunday School Committee of the N.S.P.C.I.]

May 1st.—*An Excursion into Tyre and Sidon.* Read Mark vii. 24-37. Key text, Luke ii. 32.

1. *Among the Gentiles.* Jesus did not cross the borders of Galilee for the purpose of spreading the Gospel. He was yet fully occupied in preaching to his own people. He withdrew into Tyre and Sidon because, so far as we can tell, his outspoken attack on the Pharisees had aroused a dangerous hostility. Of the two Gentile cities mentioned, Sidon (which means "Fish-town") was a great seaport, but Tyre (which means "the Rock") had captured its trade, and was, in our Lord's time, a rich and powerful city.

2. *The Syro-Phœnician Woman.* She had heard such wonderful reports of the great healer, that when she found him she confidently besought him to heal her daughter. Jesus, however, was so impressed with the amount of work he had still to do for the Jews (his own people), that he said he must *first* attend to them. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." The word our Lord used for "dogs" was a friendly one, such as is applied to dogs which are household pets. That gave the woman her chance. She quietly reminded Jesus that the house dogs get some crumbs. Her quiet answer and humble disposition revealed to Jesus another sphere of work. He healed the Gentile woman's daughter, and so became a "light unto the Gentiles."

The *return to Galilee* (verse 31). He had to return to his own people, because he was most anxious to complete his work among them. For the most part his disciples followed his example in this. They did not go out among foreign people whilst they had any hope of converting their own. But when the Jews proved themselves unworthy, then greater efforts (especially by St. Paul) were made to spread the good tidings throughout the world. Jesus set a good example here. Far too many Christian churches are inclined to neglect work at home for the sake of missionary work. But their chief efforts should be to do all they can at home, and then it will be much easier to do good work abroad. So we as individuals must show our Christianity in our own family by doing all we can for goodness and happiness for those near at hand. Then, when we have a little kingdom of God at home, we shall be all the stronger to help bring the kingdom of God into the busy world.

May 8.—*Feeding the Multitude. Read* Mark vii. 1-10. Key text, John vi. 35.

1. *Jesus' Compassion.* An eager multitude had been with him for three days, and his kindly heart was moved by the thought that they had had nothing to eat.

2. *The Miracle.* Did Jesus actually create enough material food for four thousand people out of seven loaves and a few fishes? I think the belief that he did so is due to misunderstanding on the part of the writers of the Gospels. St. John's gospel suggests the meaning of the miracle in our Lord's words, "I am the bread of Life." What very likely happened was, that our Lord infused such a friendly and happy spirit among the multitude that, even though they had scarcely anything to eat, they felt quite satisfied. They were filled; but when the story was told afterwards, folk at once jumped to the conclusion that they were filled with earthly bread, when it was the Bread of Life that had sustained them. For elder scholars show that all these stories of feeding the multitude are very confused. All the gospels tell of the five thousand, whilst in addition, Mark and Matthew tell of the four thousand. Both these versions very likely spring from the one incident of satisfying the multitude with the Bread of Life.

3. *The Bread of Life.* When we consider how urgent is hunger, the fact that Jesus could satisfy the multitude with his *spirit* is an even greater miracle than if he had done it with *bread*. Yet it is a miracle which he constantly works, even to this day. Where the Spirit of Christ is present, a large family can make quite a happy meal with very little food. Hunger is for-

gotten and overcome when unselfishness and cheerfulness prevail. Many are the stories of brave men and devoted women who have gone several days without food, or even without thinking of food, in their desire to rescue, nurse, or comfort someone less fortunate than themselves. The Bread of Life is Faith, Hope and Love.

May 15.—*The Great Scene at Cæsarea Philippi.* Read Mark viii. 27-38. Key text, Mark viii. 29.

1. *Cæsarea Philippi.* This town is in the extreme north of Galilee, miles away from the chief scenes of our Lord's ministry. The country round about is rugged and grand. It was to this remote district that our Lord withdrew to have intimate talk with his disciples, because he felt that the crisis of his life had come. He had set forth on his ministry trying to turn men's hearts to the kingdom of God, and so impressed those that came near him that they had begun to say (as he well knew) great and wonderful things about him.

2. *What do men say that I am?* Men in general had not yet realised his great meaning. They saw he was great, but no greater than a John the Baptist risen from the dead, an Elijah, or one of the prophets, one or all of whom the people thought would appear before the Messiah.

3. *What do* YE *say that I am?* Unhesitatingly Peter, on behalf of the disciples, declared, "*Thou art the Christ (the Messiah).*" It was a great tribute to Jesus that those who knew him best thought the greatest things of him. By Messiah (Christ is the Greek word for Messiah) they meant one who, under the direct influence of God, would, like a mighty prince, rule a restored and prosperous world. (Read Dr. Carpenter's "Life in Palestine.")

4. *What did Jesus say that he was?* In the first place he told them not to say anything about his being the Messiah. His chief reason was, no doubt, that he did not agree with their notions of a Messiah. There was nothing of an earthly and worldly-minded king about Jesus. Instead, he proceeded to show them that he (the Son of Man—the name he preferred to use himself) would have to suffer and be killed before the kingdom of the Messiah would appear.

5. *Peter's rebuke.* Peter was astonished and offended at the idea of suffering and degradation being associated with the Messiah.

6. *Jesus' reply.* "Thou mindest not the things of God, but of men." The divine way of helping the world to be better was the way of self-sacrifice. He was concerned with man's eternal soul, and that could only be redeemed by his showing how he despised the things of earth. Every great follower of Christ has acted on this. He has endured all things, even death, for the sake of the eternal blessedness of man. Jesus wanted above all things to make men good. Only when they were good would the kingdom of God appear. Therefore, knowing that he who stands for goodness must suffer, he was prepared to be, not a prosperous, but a suffering Messiah. All best things are born with struggle and pain.

May 22. *The descent of the Holy* Spirit. Read Acts ii.1-21. Key text, John xiv. 16.

1. *The Day of Pentecost.* The fiftieth day after Easter Sunday. Up to this day the disciples had been more or less inactive and depressed. They knew, indeed, that Jesus was risen; but they had not yet learnt what the resurrection meant for them. All they knew was that their good and great Master was no longer with them to lead them about and inspire them with noble deeds and thoughts. So they were, on this occasion, quietly assembled in a room, discussing, no doubt, the apparent hopelessness of their cause. Yet there would keep rising in their minds the memory of the blessed promises he had made them, especially the promise of the gift of the Comforter.

2. *The Gift.* This is a very difficult subject, but almost all critics are now agreed that the descent of tongues of fire should be taken as a picturesque way of describing the entrance of the Christ Spirit into the hearts of the disciples. *For elder scholars*, mention the fact that the possession of the Holy Spirit was believed by many, *e.g.*, St. Paul, to show itself by what was called "speaking

with tongues," which meant excited, inarticulate shoutings and groanings. But St. Paul had the good sense to insist that simple, helpful exhortation was also a proof of the Spirit's presence.

3. *The surprise of the crowd.* This was due either to the fact that the disciples "spake with tongues" in the Pauline sense, or else that they spoke of such wonderful things that all were impressed. The idea that they spoke in such a way that their speech was heard in all sorts of foreign languages is again only to be taken as a picturesque expression. What they really spoke, I believe, was the language of the heart, and this language is most easily understood. The disciples had received the Spirit of Comfort, and this made them comforters of their fellow-men.

4. *The meaning of Whitsuntide* is briefly this—Although only those who lived near Jesus could be comforted by him in the flesh, yet, now that he is not in the flesh, his Spirit descends on every heart that opens for it. The Spirit of Comfort abides in the world for ever. We prove that Christ has comforted us by spreading the Spirit of Comfort among all those we meet.

May 29.—*Jesus and the little children.* Read Mark x. 13-16. Key Text, Mark x. 14.

1. *They brought little children.* This should help all children to understand what a tender, bright, and happy Friend Jesus must have been. Mothers would not have brought their little babes and children to him to be blessed unless they had seen a friendly smile on his countenance.

2. *The disciples rebuked the mothers and children.* This does not mean that the disciples were hard-hearted. No, they simply made the mistake, which so many grown-ups make, of thinking that so great a one as Jesus had far more important things to do than be "bothered" with little children. No doubt many little children are often made sad by their parents and grown-ups telling them to keep quiet and not "bother." Sometimes, indeed, children do "bother" a great deal, but all the same it is wrong of grown-up people always to think that they do not matter, and that they are a bother.

3. *Jesus' indignation with the disciples.* Although, perhaps, he was very tired, Jesus got very indignant with those who regarded the children as a "bother." Instead, he called the children to him. He had come to tell of heaven, and he knew, as none other, that without children heaven could not be. "For of such is the Kingdom of God," he declared. Is not this a great encouragement to children? Should it not make all children most anxious to come to Jesus, and to try to please him by doing his will?

4. *What Jesus did for children.* He made the grown-up people realize that children were *very* important. He loved them, and told them that God loved them, by revealing God as a Father. Children, above all, should be able to feel that there is a loving heavenly Father about them always; because, unless their own selfishness, or other people's wickedness, stands in the way, they will find that this is a great world for children—so many lovely things to look at, so many wonderful things to find out, so many jolly places to play in, and so many great games to play. All their happiness comes to them because of their heavenly Father. Jesus did a great thing for children when he showed that God had made this world and the heavenly world especially for children.

*For elder scholars.* Stress the fact that our Lord's love for children marks a new era for them. Where his spirit prevails, children are realized as being of supreme importance. Their needs are catered for, their pleasures are carefully considered; for "the child is father of the man." Under the impulse of the Christ spirit, we keep children out of the factories, provide good homes and education, establish playgrounds, and do all we can to keep the spirit of childlike happiness and trust unimpaired.

5. *He took them in his arms.* Note this beautifully human touch. Like a loving father he embraced the children, and thus symbolizes the great joy that God the Father has in taking little children to His loving and protective arms.

E. H. P.

## Ulster Unitarian Christian Association.

The Annual Sermons on behalf of the Association were preached by the Rev. Herbert Barnes, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, on Sunday, April 3rd, in the morning in the First Presbyterian Church, Belfast, and in the evening in the Comber Unitarian Church. There were large attendances at both services. The collections were generous and somewhat larger than in previous years. On the following evening, the Annual Meeting of subscribers and friends was held in the Comber schoolroom, and again there was a large attendance, including Rev. D. J. Williams, M. Watkins, A. Whitford, H. Barnes, J. Glynne Davies; Messrs. J. M. Andrews, D.L., W. Andrews, J. D. Andrews, Percy Andrews, R. Abernethy, Hugh Erskine, W. Greenfield, R. M'Crum, A. L. Agnew, B.A., J. Harold Smith, David Munn, F. J. Orr, Thos. Lindsay, Hugh Ferguson, Munro Ferguson, Robert Simpson, A. O. Simpson, David Barnes, etc. Tea was provided by the generosity of Mrs. Thomas Andrews, of Ardara. Mrs. Davies presided at the tea tables, and Mr. John M. Andrews, D.L., presided. After devotional exercises, conducted by Mr. J. Harold Smith, Rev. G. J. Slipper read the Committee's report, which stated that there was need of a more distinct missionary effort, and an appeal was made for more generous financial help. The Committee gratefully acknowledged the receipt of a donation of £100 from Miss Riddel, and £20 from Mr. Henry Musgrave, D.L., to be invested and the interest applied as an annual subscription "In memory of John Musgrave, D.L." Reference was also made to the passing of some loyal subscribers and friends of the Association, among them Miss Orr (Clonmel), Mr. George Andrews, Mr. Robert Dickson, Mr. W. Kell, Mr. Thomas Roberts (Dunmurry), and Mr. A. Kennedy Stewart. The financial statement was presented by Mr. C. J. M'Kisack (Hon. Treasurer), and showed a small credit balance. The Chairman, in moving the adoption of the report, welcomed the meeting to Comber, and referred to the usefulness of the Association and the need for a larger subscription list. Mr. F. J. Orr (Comber) seconded, and it was carried unanimously. In reply to a vote of welcome and thanks, Rev. Herbert Barnes gave an earnest and impressive address, advocating the necessity of grasping the opportunity which presented itself for spreading our faith. He also brought greetings from the Northumberland and Durham Unitarian Christian Association, in which was expressed the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship. Rev. D. J. Williams moved, and Rev. A. Whitford seconded, in interesting addresses, the resolution renewing adhesion to the principles and objects of the Association. The Rev. M. Watkins voiced the thanks of the meeting to the Chairman, to Mrs. Andrews, of Ardara, and to the Minister and Committee of Congregation. Mr. C. J. M'Kisack seconded. The Chairman and Rev. J. Glynne Davies responded.

The election of Committee having taken place, in which the Rev. J. Glynne Davies takes the place of Mr. Ervine, the meeting was concluded with hymn and benediction pronounced by Mr. Davies.

### SUNDAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE.

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE will be held at the Non-Subscribing Church, Comber, on Saturday, 4th June, at 2-45 p.m. Tea (provided by the Comber congregation) at 4-45 p.m. Speakers: Rev. Matthew Watkins—"Musical Festivals for our Sunday Schools," and Rev. Albert Whitford—"The Objects of the Sunday School." Chairman:—The Moderator.

### ESSAY COMPETITION.

First Prize (10/-)—Eileen Steele, All Souls', Belfast. Two Second Prizes (5/- each)—Minnie Bailie, Dromore, and Lilian Reid, All Souls', Belfast.

The Prizes will be awarded at the Sunday School Conference. Will the Prize Winners please let me know whether they would prefer their Prizes in money or in what other form?

ERNEST H. PICKERING,
Convener.

# The Laymen's League

I.—The Chapter.

Now that there is a Chapter of the Laymen's League in actual being in Ireland, it can do no harm (and may perhaps do some good) to put in concrete form the ideas which have occurred, since its inception, to one of the members.

Its chief work will be within the congregations, and therefore the ideal for which we must strive without ceasing is a Chapter in each congregation. And the work of that Chapter will be to breathe a new spirit into the old bones of the congregation's life.

Our cautious Secretary told us that we must be careful not to interfere with the ministers and existing church organizations, and though one would like to avoid such a harsh word as "interfere," we must frankly ask ourselves are we satisfied with things as they exist at present? If so, there is no necessity for the League at all. But if we are not content with things as we find them to-day, how are we to put them to rights unless we do "interfere"? It is not necessary to be noisy or offensive, and we should proceed along perfectly constitutional lines. Let the Chapter decide, after careful discussion, what it considers would be for the betterment of the congregation and place the matter before a congregational meeting, or see that men holding the desired opinions are duly elected to the necessary Committees.

The writer was once shown a Church Report with a list of Committees as long as your arm, among which appeared an "Agenda Committee." On asking what the functions of this Committee were, he was informed that it was the Committee "to get things done." Now, that is exactly what a Chapter of the League should aim at being. It ought to strive to "get things done," always using the existing machinery for its purposes. The machinery has, in many cases, rusted up a bit from disuse, but all that is required is to grease it well.

As to the kind of work the Chapter should undertake, this will largely fall on the Development Committee, and will consist of endeavouring to induce members to attend the services regularly. Each member of that Committee should have his own district allotted to him and make it his business to visit all Sunday-absentees during the following week, when, if he found real sickness or distress, he could at once report to the minister. Work of this kind would be a real help and would show that a living interest was taken in the members of the congregation by one another.

Another defect might easily be remedied by the presence of someone at the church to speak a word of welcome to strangers, show them to their seats, and try to break down that aloofness which is so characteristic of many of our people.

The Chapter should also take up the important question of Eldership and insist on men being appointed who would attend the Presbytery Meeting, thus securing proper representation for the congregation there.

The Social Committee would also have an important part to play in the life of the congregation in providing healthy recreation and keeping the young people employed about the church. Most of our congregations suffer greatly through the drifting away of the young life. At the age of about 16, the young people discontinue attendance at the Sunday School, because they find better opportunities for social intercourse elsewhere. This opens up a vast field for a really active Social Committee. We ought to look upon the young people of to-day as the future pillars of the church, and must do all in our power to keep them interested in the life of our congregation. It may be that our services are not attractive enough, and the suggestion has been thrown out for holding a series of Sunday Afternoon Services. The writer would, however, counsel caution. For why begin a third service when the two you have are neglected by so many? A more practical step appears to be to make your Evening Service more attractive along the lines

recently put forward by Mr. Bertram Talbot in the "Inquirer."

Let the members of each congregation determine to put their own house in order before presuming to offer help to others. NADIE.

## Reports

**Belfast: Domestic Mission.**—It is gratifying to record the success attained by our Girls' Club at the recent Drill and Musical Competitions. In each instance the Juniors gained first prizes, while the Seniors secured second and fourth marks in drill and singing respectively. Such results are most encouraging both to the girls and instructors, and it is hoped that we may achieve even greater success on future occasions. Several of our winter meetings have been closed for the summer session, and it is generally felt that much helpful and useful work has been accomplished. On Saturday, April 9th, a Congregational Party took place. About 80 of our people sat down to tea, after which a resumé of the year's work was presented by the Missionary. During the evening a programme, consisting of musical drill, part songs, pianoforte and vocal solos, recitations and games, was arranged and greatly enjoyed by all present. On behalf of the Mission Congregation the Missionary presented a tea service, in token of respect and appreciation, to Mr. and Mrs. J. Elmes (nee Miss Clara Wilson) wishing them every joy and prosperity on the occasion of their marriage. The Scholars' Anniversary and Flower Services are arranged to take place on Sunday, May 29th.

**Banbridge.**—A very happy gathering assembled in the Dunbar Memorial School on Friday, 15th April, on the occasion of the Annual Congregational Social. After tea, the Minister was moved to the chair and gave a short address, which was followed by an excellent musical programme, contributed to by Mrs. M'Cammon, Miss Dornan, Miss Shanks, Miss Helen Stevenson, Mr. Adamson, Mr. Carson, and Mr. James M'Keown. Two extremely pretty glees ("The Two Roses" and "There is Music by the River") were tastefully rendered by the Choir. Our Dramatic Society excelled themselves by their production of the screaming farce, "Poor Pillicoddy," in which Mr. W. T. Radcliffe was excellent in the part of "Mr. Pillicoddy," Miss Stevenson made a fascinating "Miss Pillicoddy," Miss Eileen Stevenson and Mr. James M'Keown played the parts of "Mrs. and Captain O'Scuttle" with great vigour, while Miss Dornan was indeed "Bridget." This performance was punctuated throughout by well-deserved applause. Mr. S. Bell, in a very eloquent speech making reference to the work of our Organist and wonderful co-operation between herself and her choir, proposed a vote of thanks to all who had contributed to one of our most enjoyable evenings. This was endorsed by Mr. M'Cammon in his usual happy vein, and Mr. Godding suitably replied. The proceedings concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

**Ballee.**—For our young folk the monotony of country winter life has again been brightened by the existence of the mixed hockey club, which has enjoyed an unusually successful season, with the unique record of having defeated all similar clubs within the radius of East Down. Thoughts now turn eagerly towards the approaching tennis season, and at a meeting held in the clubroom on 14th ult., with Rev. J. H. Bibby, President, in the chair, steps were taken to inaugurate the same, on Thursday afternoon, 12th inst., the opening afternoon tea to be provided by the gentlemen members. To the ground adjoining the Meeting-House a third tennis court has now been added, and membership is extended so as to embrace the young people of neighbouring churches. On the motion of Mr. Robert M'Cullen, C.E., M.A.S.I., a cordial vote of thanks was passed by acclamation to the young ladies who so very kindly provided afternoon tea weekly throughout last season. The Rev. J. H. Bibby was again unanimously elected President of the Club, and best thanks are due to him for continued kindly interest shown in the younger members of the congregation, who by his unostentatious efforts have been drawn and kept together.

**Comber.**—The Annual Sunday School Party was held in the Schoolroom on Friday evening, March 4th. There was a large gathering of scholars and members of the congregation, who were entertained to an enjoyable tea. The prizes for regular attendance were presented by Mrs. Hind, Ardara. Many of the prizewinners had an unbroken attendance for the year, and a few had not missed a Sunday for many years. Following the tea and presentation of prizes a theatrical entertainment was given by the scholars, which consisted of three plays given by the junior members entitled "The Princess and the Pea," "Rose Red and Snow White," and "A Game of Romps." A sketch entitled "Congratulations" was given by the senior scholars. All the plays were ably performed, and even the "tiny tots" showed evidence of good talent and careful training. Our best thanks are due to Miss E. L. Andrews, Miss Eva Andrews and Miss R. Todd for their patient and careful training of the children and for the praiseworthy manner in which the plays were produced. The performances were repeated on the following Friday evening to an appreciative audience which crowded the building. The Annual Congregational Meeting was held on Friday evening, March 25th, when there was a representative attendance. The evening opened with a cup of tea dispensed by the ladies, after which Mr. J. M. Andrews, D.L., took the chair. Mr. F. J. Orr, solicitor, submitted the Secretary's report, which showed that good work had been accomplished during the year. Reference was made to the structural alterations that had been successfully effected in the Church building and to the enthusiastic and generous manner in which every member had contributed towards defraying the heavy expenses incurred in connection with the alterations. Deep sympathy was expressed with the relatives of those of our fellowship who had passed "behind the veil" during the past year. Their place among us shall know them no more and our Church is much the poorer for their loss. The Treasurer's report, which was very satisfactory, was presented by the Treasurer, Mr. James Simpson, and that of the Presidental and Choir Funds by Mr. R. Abernethy. The Sunday School report was read by the Superintendent, Mr. H. Percy Andrews, and it revealed that very faithful and valuable work was done in this department. The Young People's Society have had another prosperous season, and the Unity Players have rendered valuable assistance both at home and in other churches. Hearty votes of thanks for their efficient services were accorded organists and choir, the Sunday and School teachers and the Minister. Following the business meeting a programme of music, recitations, etc., was given, consisting of the following items: A glee by the Choir; solo, Miss Edith Todd; 'cello solo, Miss M. Andrews; recitation, Miss A. Stewart; male quartette, Messrs. J. Munn, D. Stewart, H. M'Cormick and J. G. Davies. A play entitled "The Mysterious Medium," by the Unity Players; recitation, Miss Margaret Orr. A very successful and enjoyable evening was brought to a close by the singing of the National Anthem. Musical successes—It is very pleasant to report that the two young and gifted daughters of Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Andrews, of Maxwell Court, Comber, gained distinction at the recent Belfast Musical Competitions. Miss Josephine Andrews secured the Gold Medal in the Violin Solo for competitors under the age of thirteen, and Miss Marie Andrews took the Second Prize in the Junior 'Cello Solo. We heartily congratulate both sisters and wish them still greater success in the near future.

**Larne and Kilwaughter.**—The Annual Business Meeting of the Congregation was held in the School-room on March 23rd, when there was a fairly representative attendance of members. Unfortunately Mr. Kennedy was unable to be present, as he was suffering from severe cold. Mr. Samuel Craig being called upon to preside, introduced the business of the meeting. The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts having been read and passed, were ordered to be printed for circulation among the members. The appointment of Committees and Office-bearers for ensuing

year concluded the usual business meeting.

**Laymen's League.**—The Belfast Chapter held its first General Meeting in the Central Hall, Belfast, on Tuesday, 12th April, when the attendance numbered about 30. Great interest was shown in all the points discussed, and there was no lack of ready speakers. It was decided to hold a special conference with our Moderator (Rev. G. L. Phelps) and the ministers of our church at the earliest possible date to discuss with them the work of the League and solicit their interest; it is hoped that all who take part—both clergy and laity—will be stimulated and encouraged by the free discussion of our mutual work. It was also arranged that if the President of the League, Dr. George Jessel, comes over for the Sunday School Conference, he is to be asked to address the League on the Sunday afternoon. A further arrangement is to take advantage of the presence of any country laymen at the meetings of Synod, by holding a meeting at that time. This will be a good opportunity for country laymen to join the League and find out from personal observation the strength and usefulness of the movement. Further particulars will be announced later, and all enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Sec., Mr. J. H. GILLILAND, 33 Gresham Street, Belfast.

**Mountpottinger.**—During the past month everyone has been so busy preparing for the Bazaar, which by the time these lines appear in print will be a thing of the past, that there is little or nothing to record. It might be mentioned, however, that the monthly Scholars' Service on the first Sunday of each month recently inaugurated by our Minister, has met with decided success, as the scholars appear very keen on attending, and follow the service with marked interest.

**Unity Guild.**—The annual meeting of the Unity Guild was held in the Central Hall on Wednesday, April 13th, at 7-30 p.m. The outgoing President, Mr. E. R. Jackson, occupied the chair, and called upon the Hon. Secretary and the Hon. Treasurer to read their reports. These showed the Guild to be in a flourishing condition, and that the following have been made from the funds: £12 12s. 0d. to the Sustentation Fund of the N.S.P.C.I., £2 2s. 0d. to the "Non-Subscribing Presbyterian," and £2 4s. 0d. to the Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, Queen Street. The Rev. H. J. Rossington, M.A., B.D., was unanimously elected President for the ensuing year. The remaining business was quickly gone through in order to allow of as much time as possible for the Lantern Lecture, "Swiss Travel by Road and Rail," which was to be delivered by the Rev. H. J. Rossington, and was eagerly awaited by the audience. The Lecture, which was illustrated with about 80 slides, was most interesting and instructive and was much enjoyed by those present. The annual Service will be held in York Street Church on Sunday, May 22nd, at 3-30, when it is hoped there will be a good attendance. The following excursions have been arranged for the summer months:—May 21, The Knockagh; June 18, Carnalea; July 23, Castlereagh Hills or The Lagan; September, 3, Divis.

### PROVIDENCE.

We plan—and plan: "This shall be so—
and so,"
"This shall I do," and "Thither shall I go."
Yet as the hours shape themselves to days,
We tread not in those same self-chosen ways:
Our feet are led 'long paths we had not guessed,
And lo! we find those newer paths are best!

—W. J. PRICE.

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A little work, a little play
To keep us going—and so
Good-day!
A little warmth, a little light
Of love's bestowing—and so
Good-night!
A little fun to match the sorrow
Of each day's growing—and so
Good-morrow!
A little trust that when we die,
We reap our sowing! and so,
Good-bye!

—GEORGE DU MAURIER.

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